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MAJOR PARAMETERS FOR DEVELOPING NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT
OF NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

2009 REVIEW

**MAJOR PARAMETERS
OF A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK
FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**



Kuriat Island, Tunisia. Source: Louis Marie PREAU

Mediterranean Action Programme - Barcelona Convention

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In principle, it would be up to each country to tackle National Strategies for Sustainable Development (NSSD) in accordance to its political, historical, cultural, economic and ecological circumstances. However, it cannot be ignored that when countries choose to join broader groups and economic integration organizations and sign treaties and conventions, they do relegate to such bodies part of this right. In such cases, they have to follow broader perspectives and norms – jointly agreed upon with the other parties – which, nevertheless, always leave room for flexibility that allows the taking into account of national specificities.

What follow are some suggested parameters that can be taken into account in the development of NSSDs. These parameters take into account the broader supranational context and framework within which Mediterranean countries are functioning.

In all cases, however, it is imperative to ensure as much as possible a consistency in maintaining and expanding approaches that help balance and integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions, with well articulated timeframes, actors and means of implementation.

1. Salient Characteristics and Principles of an NSSD¹

A widely accepted definition of sustainable development

A Strategy for sustainable development comprises a coordinated set of participatory and continuously improving non-exclusive public policy processes of analysis, debate, capacity strengthening, planning and investment. Such a Strategy is or should be frequently updated and revised based on experience. The aim is to guide and coordinate policies; secure coherence and synergies between strategies; and integrate the short and long term economic, social and environmental objectives of society - through mutually supportive approaches that aim to induce institutional change, influence norms and values, and stimulate action.

Legitimacy

The legitimacy of an NSSD could be better established through:

- inclusion of the sustainable development concept and its driving principles in the Constitution or a special law;
- securing Parliamentary endorsement; and
- adequate consultation with all concerned and as broad agreement as possible.

Broader regional goal

The overriding goal to be pursued is reducing the gaps between the Northern rim countries and the Southern rim ones. The present situation is far from being one of "regional solidarity".

Objectives

- improve the quality of life and the standards of living
- increase employment opportunities and reduce unemployment
- reduce poverty and expand the coverage of social security
- eradicate illiteracy and develop education
- enhance human resources and institutional capacity
- increase women participation in development
- promote innovation, scientific research and technological development
- conserve natural resources
- preserve and restore the environment

¹ Many of the issues raised were adapted from OECD DAC (2001), UN DESA (2002) and Dalal-Clayton and Stephen Bass (2002).

Characteristics

Integrating the OECD² and MAP³ logical framework, an NSSD could have the following characteristics:

- strong political commitment and leadership at the highest level
- policy and objectives integration and shared vision across sectors and territories
- long- term intergenerational timeframe
- integrated assessment tools and reliable analysis
- strong institutions with clear mandates and good governance
- fully and substantially involved and empowered local administration
- broad and wide- ranging stakeholder participation with a sense of joint ownership
- effective partnerships based on equality and reciprocal commitments, building on and expanding existing knowledge and expertise
- effective and coherent regulatory, fiscal and voluntary means of implementation
- realistic and measurable targets and indicators
- monitoring, evaluation and feedback, including by peers and independent bodies

Some of these salient characteristics are further articulated below.

Policy integration, coherence and synergies

Links need to be established between: social, environmental and economic issues and actions; different sectors; local, national, regional and global priorities; and between the long, the medium and the short term time horizons.

Integration – horizontal as well as vertical- needs to be more systematically pursued by utilizing the potentials of such tools as national fiscal conditionality, Market Based Instruments, Impact Assessments, Strategic Environmental Assessments, Environmental Impact Assessments, integration of sustainable development considerations into State reforms; linking strategies with the budgets, public spending and national economic development policies, including the fiscal ones; etc.

The policy framework in place should aim to balance all three pillars of sustainable development through practical and effective decision- making processes that improve consultation and co-ordination of objectives, strategies and policies.

A NSSD should be professionally implemented in order for it to be widely accepted as the umbrella strategy within the context and directions of which all other strategic are reformulated and implemented. To this respect, methodological development and multidisciplinary capacity building will be necessary to guarantee endorsement by public agencies and civil society.

Stakeholder involvement and participation

The formulation, implementation, monitoring, review and revision procedures in place should ensure:

- putting peoples at the centre stage
- consensus on long-term vision
- well-defined, differentiated and broadly agreed implementation responsibilities
- transparency and accountability
- access to information for all stakeholders and effective networking
- formalised channels for communication and interaction
- partnerships among government, civil society, private sector and external institutions
- timeliness

The role of all main stakeholder groups needs to be well articulated, enhanced, promote but also monitored and periodically assessed. Strategies should not limit commitments solely to the State but extend them to the rights and obligations of local authorities, economic and social actors, and NGOs.

² OECD (2006), *Good Practices in the National Sustainable Development Strategies, Sustainable Development Studies*.

³ MSSD; MoUs with Mediterranean Countries.

Consultation and participation arrangements fostering stakeholder ownership require constant efforts to ensure that the vision for the future remains a common one.

A multi-stakeholder steering entity, comprising representatives of the public sector, the private sector and civil society has proven its worth in ensuring equitable governance of the Strategy processes.

Links with local levels/ Local Agendas 21⁴

National authorities need to empower regional and local authorities to participate on an even position in national sustainable development processes and initiatives, and provide support for all programmes and partnerships aimed to deliver effective outcomes at the local level. Through an interactive process, local administration needs to be provided with adequate resources and empowerment through, for example, de-concentration.

Local Agendas 21 represent a major innovation in local planning for sustainable development and they have effectively induced and encouraged city governments not only to acquire experiences but also to start undertaking a share of their own responsibilities. Key factors for success identified by practitioners include:

- involvement in the planning process of a representative local stakeholder group serving as the coordination and policy body for preparing a local sustainable development action plan linking national and local priorities
- consultation with community groups, youth organisations, NGOs, business, churches, the academia, government agencies, professional groups and unions, in order to create a shared vision and to identify proposals and priorities for action
- participatory assessment of local social, economic and environmental conditions and needs
- monitoring and reporting procedures, including local indicators, to track progress and to allow participants to hold each other accountable to the action plan

Indicators/ monitoring and review

Monitoring and assessment of implementation should be pursued within a clearly identified integrated system that avoids duplication and allows for the early identification of problems and signs of misdirection. Independent, credible assessments based on a broadly agreed and measurable list of indicators, should be encouraged.

Mechanisms used could include objectives jointly agreed, guidelines, comparison of performance, etc.

Institutional mechanisms/ coordination and management systems⁵

In order to effectively deliver on the challenge to anchor the different dimensions of sustainable development into institutional reality, the governance sections - which are presently virtually absent or extremely general and weak in all Strategies- need to be substantially strengthened and include provisions on who will do what, how and when, conflict resolution processes, etc.

The role of National Councils for Sustainable Development should be very clear and legally mandated.

As everything else in public governance, an effective Strategy for sustainable development requires good management that provides leadership, organizes, coordinates and administers the different processes, harnesses the human and financial capacities and potential, and monitors achievements. Whichever body or system of bodies is assigned such functions should be politically, legally and financially empowered.

Global

Cooperation between the different agencies involved in the use of aid in the Mediterranean could use more streamlining and coherence through the MCSD, the EU SDS and other related processes.

A greater volume of resources needs to be devoted to countries in need than those made available so far, in order to contribute to their sustainable development requirements and assist them in fulfilling their commitments, particularly in fighting poverty and social inequalities.

National Strategies are inherently unable to accommodate global processes such as poverty, globalization or trade, issues perhaps that should better be left to be dealt with under Regional strategies.

⁴ Source: Dalal-Clayton and Stephen Bass (2002) modified from OECD DAC (2001).

⁵ Source: *Ibid.*

2. Content of a Typical NSSD

While the general definition, characteristics and structure of national sustainable development strategies are broadly accepted and applied, the elements of a Strategy will vary across countries.

Using the information in this Review and the Country Profiles, as well as in other reviews and national experiences, countries may want to develop their own format for their NSSD, most certainly selecting and organising the elements that apply to a specific country's situation, building on what already exists, and making new arrangements when appropriate. In this approach, account should also be made of broader regional and global obligations and their respective frameworks,

Nevertheless, it should be stressed that contemporary trends are towards concise, strategic- oriented documents showing priorities and the way forward.

This model has drawn from such texts as the ESDN Basics of SDS; the renewed EU SDS; the EU NSSD Peer Review Guidebook; the EU's Synthesis Report and Country Case Studies on NSSD; the OECD Guidance in preparing a NSSD; the DAC Guidelines for SSDs; the MAP's MOUs for the preparation of a NSSD; as well as on selected national strategies, such as the new French NSSD and the Montenegro NSSD, as well as on some strategies from countries outside the European region.

As far as the sectoral/horizontal issues are concerned, it is suggested that strategies concentrate on the following priority themes and sectors as they relate to national priorities, which were collectively agreed within the most relevant regional processes⁶:

- energy management and addressing the impacts of climate change
- sustainable transport
- tourism
- urban development
- agriculture
- food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy
- fisheries
- management of coastal areas, the sea and marine resources
- conservation of natural resources
- sustainable consumption and production
- cultural protection
- peace and security
- human rights and the protection of minorities
- justice, freedom and security
- poverty alleviation
- population and public health
- employment, social policy, inclusion
- education and training
- research and development
- regional issues and international obligations
- globalization, trade and investment
- visa, border control, asylum and migration

⁶ MSSD; EU SDS, Enlargement/ Accession Strategy, Stabilization and Association Agreements; League of Arab States.